

for changes for the better are pinned on the new American leader. We in Kazakhstan sincerely wish the 44th U.S. president strong health and strong political will to fully realize his good intentions of making America and the world safer and more prosperous.

Kazakhstan and the U.S. are time-tested strategic partners with successful experience of working together in such critical areas as nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the fight against terrorism, energy, and democracy. A phone conversation soon after the election between Obama and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev instilled confidence that, under the new administration, Kazakhstan-U.S. relations would continue to grow. The two leaders discussed further cooperation on pressing international problems such as nonproliferation, the fight against terrorism and the stabilization of Afghanistan.

We in Kazakhstan not only share the new administration's concern with these problems but also believe their solution lies through stronger cooperation of progressive nations sharing common values. Closing our ranks even further is especially crucial today in the face of the most serious economic crisis the world has seen. "America is strongest when we act alongside strong partners," says President Obama. Kazakhstan is such a partner eager to continue working shoulder to shoulder with the United States and others to build a more secure and prosperous world.

Cooperation in the critical area of nonproliferation has been a cornerstone of our strategic partnership. In the early 1990s, President Nazarbayev took a courageous decision to voluntarily renounce the world's fourth-largest nuclear arsenal (which it held while part of the old Soviet Union). Working with the U.S. under the outstanding Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, Kazakhstan has fully rid itself of nuclear weapons and their infrastructure, becoming an active participant in global nonproliferation processes. Today, our cooperation, recognized as the most effective model for removing a nuclear threat, successfully continues.

We are greatly encouraged by the fact that nonproliferation is among the top priorities for President Obama and his administration. We believe it is necessary to not only continue our bilateral cooperation, but also to use more actively the example of Kazakhstan's nuclear disarmament and our cooperation with the United States in convincing other countries to renounce their nuclear-weapon ambitions. Kazakhstan's dynamic economic development since independence, and the evolution of our country into an equal and respected partner of the international community—confirmed by Kazakhstan's election as chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)—these are all arguments which prove that renouncing nuclear weapons and opting for mutually beneficial cooperation with the world is a more effective way of ensuring a country's security than a nuclear bludgeon.

Kazakhstan, having initially supported efforts of the United States and other countries in Operation Enduring Freedom, will continue to assist the international coalition actions in Afghanistan as these are directed at strengthening security and stability in Central Asia and beyond, which is in our common interests. The international community should pour more efforts into the political settlement and economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan, as well as in reducing, and, eventually, eliminating fully, the production and smuggling of drugs out of that country.

Today, it is crucial to continue building bridges between Islam and the West, and to renounce phobia of Islam in the West and phobia of the West in the Islamic world. Kazakhstan, a secular Muslim-majority country bridging Europe and Asia, is uniquely positioned to promote such dialogue and understanding. At President Nazarbayev's initiative, this year Kazakhstan will host the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Last year, Astana hosted a forum, "Common World: Progress through Diversity," bringing together foreign ministers from Western and Oriental nations. Last but not least, Kazakhstan will chair the OSCE in 2010 and the OIC in 2011. Promoting the dialog of civilizations during this important period will be one of our top priorities, and we hope to achieve greater mutual understanding between the West and the Islamic world. Again, Kazakhstan is eager to work together with the United States in this area of great importance to us all.

We welcome Barack Obama's intention to visit Kazakhstan. He would become the first-ever sitting U.S. President to visit not just Kazakhstan but also the region of Central Asia. Such a visit would both give a new, powerful boost to our bilateral cooperation and help chart a new way forward in U.S. relations with moderate Muslim nations. That is why we sincerely say to the American leader: "Welcome to Kazakhstan, Mr. President!"

CELEBRATING THE CENTENNIAL OF THE HIGHLANDS-CASHIERS LAND TRUST

HON. HEATH SHULER

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 9, 2009

Mr. SHULER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the Centennial of the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, or HCLT, and to recognize the contributions which the HCLT has made to the Western North Carolina community, and especially land conservation efforts, over the past 100 years. The HCLT works to preserve the natural areas, scenic beauty, and green spaces of the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau for the enjoyment and benefit of the public.

The HCLT has been in operation since 1883, though known then as the Highlands Improvement Association. The first land purchase was effectuated in 1909. This initial purchase was for 56 acres of land on the Summit of Satulah Mountain, overlooking the town of Highlands, for \$100.

The HCLT is the oldest land trust in North Carolina and one of the oldest in the United States. The trust protects over 1,700 acres in Western North Carolina. Included in the protected lands are two sites of particularly significant historical importance. The Hill property in Horse Cove is significant for its role during the Trail of Tears. The site was used as a holding area for Native Americans before they began the treacherous trip to Oklahoma, leaving their native homes and villages behind. The second site, the Warren Property, was an original land grant from the first pioneer to the area, Barak Norton. The unique property was featured in the October 2008 issue of "Southern Living Magazine" for the breath-taking vistas.

Among the more recent endeavors of the HCLT are various educational and philan-

thropic projects. The HCLT raised more than \$450,000 to purchase a property to be used as a park in the town of Highlands, North Carolina. They also preserve properties which protect rare and endangered species of plants and trees, included in this is the original Satulah Mountain land. Satulah Mountain is home to many species of endangered plants and wildflowers which are studied by university students from all over the world. In conjunction with these efforts the HCLT strives to remain active in the community through the Mountain Retreat, an 80 acre conservation easement used for many Elderhostel programs, focusing on Appalachian culture, music, and heritage.

Madam Speaker, the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust has made an indelible contribution to land preservation in Western North Carolina and I commend them for their continuing dedication to both conservation and community.

TRIBUTE TO RETIRING SECRETARY DONALD C. WINTER

HON. IKE SKELTON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 9, 2009

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Speaker, let me take this moment to recognize the career of Secretary Donald C. Winter who is retiring this March after serving three years as Secretary of the Navy.

Secretary Winter earned his Bachelor of Arts from the University of Rochester in 1969. He received a Master's degree and Doctorate in Physics from the University of Michigan in 1970 and 1972, respectively. Also, he was a graduate of the USC Management Policy Institute, a 1987 graduate of the UCLA Executive Program, and a 1991 graduate of the Harvard University Program for Senior Executives in National and International Security.

Prior to serving as Secretary of the Navy, Dr. Winter served as a corporate Vice President and President of Northrop Grumman's Mission System's sector. Additionally, he served as president and CEO of TRW systems. From 1980 to 1982, he served as program manager for the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency in which he was responsible for space acquisition, tracking and pointing programs.

As Secretary Winter retires from his current post, I trust that the Members of the House will join me in thanking him for his exceptional commitment to the Department of Navy and the safety and security of America.

TRIBUTE TO SURLENE G. GRANT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 9, 2009

Mr. STARK. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Surlene Grant in honor of ten years of dedication to the community of San Leandro, California. On Friday, June 30, 2009, the San Leandro African American Business Council and Friends and Fans of Surlene Grant will honor Ms. Grant for her accomplishments and meritorious contributions.